

17 April 1969

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Dear Francois

I was so pleased to get your very friendly and helpful letter. Like you, I find myself in my present position mainly due to historical accident. I only went to the earlier Spetsai meeting because I wanted to take my boat to Greece. While at the meeting I was asked to "lend my name" for the organisation of the next meeting. Then the junta took over, many people backed out, and I was left holding the baby!

For the record, Evangelopoulos has reminded me that when I met him last year we agreed that no Government official should address the next Spetsai meeting. Mark and Brian wrote to the Greek Ambassador last year about students from Eastern Europe, but he didn't reply until I wrote myself. On the other hand, I had not appreciated the point about the Government making propaganda until your committee brought it to my attention. Nor had I realised that Greek academies had been dismissed without any right of appeal.

The reason why I personally object to the Vatican is not that they are terribly oppressive politically, (although their position on birth control is likely to have unfortunate political repercussions in places like South America) but because, at bottom, they have an idea about truth which, as a scientist, I cannot accept. A totally Catholic regime is bound to be "oppressive" for intellectuals, since good Catholics are desired freedom of belief (and therefore of expression) in certain areas. Fortunately, one can opt to leave the Catholic church. But then one can also opt to leave Greece. Although I agree that at present the conflict between Catholicism and Science is slight, I think it is almost bound to increase as we learn more about man and his nervous system. As scientists, we should be most sensitive about regimes which do not allow freedom to express scientific ideas (as in the Lysenko period in the Soviet Union). Freedom on political ideas should be a secondary consideration.

However, in most cases it is some kind of lack of political freedom which is likely to concern us. I think that individuals should be

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allowed the luxury of behaving as they think fit. But organisations are only justified if they have some hope of effect action, and not if they only exist to ease the consciences of their members. So we have to ask, as far as Greece is concerned, what effective action can be taken.

I think it is relatively easy to lay down rules for the holding of meetings (since if these conditions are not met by the country concerned the meeting will not be held there) provided the rules only apply to the actual conduct of the meeting, and matters directly related to it, and do not touch wider issues.

But what about these wider issues? Let us take the case of Greece.

- (1) Torture: I doubt if any further action is worthwhile here. Due to pressure from the Western press the Greek Government is now so sensitive on this issue that I think it unlikely to occur again.
- (2) Academic dismissal: It seems to me that your committee could do a useful job if it persuaded the Greek Government to set up proper judicial machinery to deal with the appeals of dismissed academics. Naturally one would prefer this to act retrospectively, but even proper machinery for the future would be a step forward. You could usefully call for a boycott of scientific meetings if this was not granted for the future. I strongly suggest that your committee considers approaching the Greek Ambassador to France along these lines.
- (3) Freedom of Speech: I find this a baffling problem. (Even in England there are some restrictions on freedom of speech, although they are very slight). Certainly one can insist here on proper judicial procedure, but beyond that I find it difficult to know what to suggest.

Reading what I have written, I am surprised to find that what appears useful is to insist on certain legal processes. For example, habeas corpus, and the right to a fair and public trial. I think if a country has to act in this way it brings its actions into the open, where they can be usefully criticized by the Western press. (Right of freedom of the foreign press to report would be another right).

From this it follows that your committee should take immediate steps to get one or two lawyers associated with it, and ask their

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advice about what legal actions, by a Government, should be insisted on. I admit this is a most surprising conclusion, but I have been driven to it by my own logic! Incidentally, there is an organisation known as Amnesty which deals with issues of this kind.

What I am suggesting, therefore, is that there should be a set of legal criteria which would decide whether a country should be subjected to a scientific boycott. Any country so boycotted would not be permitted to do certain things, such as act as the official host to a scientific convention. Nor would individual scientists be advised to accept invitations from official bodies in such a country. However, in order to maintain scientific contact, individual scientists could visit such a country, and small unofficial meetings to be held. Clearly, one would have to work out an acceptable code of behaviour (Problem: what happens if the country wants to commemorate a meeting, or a foreign scientist, on a stamp?!).

I am sending copies of this letter to Jacques Monod and Martin Pollock. Clearly, the problem is a difficult one, and needs further discussion. I suggest that you talk things over with Jacques, and he and I will discuss matters when he is here towards the end of this month. Perhaps we might meet some time in May. I also enclose a copy of a letter from Evangelopoulos, which I think Jacques has already shown you.

With warmest regards  
Yours sincerely

F.H.C. Crick